

SOME STATISTICS AND QUOTATIONS ON POVERTY AND

MALNUTRITION IN THE UNITED STATES



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One of the most startling developments of recent years was the discovery that approximately 3,000,000 American farm families are existing today on abnormally low incomes and at unwholesomely low standards of living. Many are in extreme poverty. Almost 2,000,000 rural families were on relief in 1935, and relatively few of them are better off today. (From IF Division's "How Farm Security Adm. is Helping Low-Income Farm Families" July 1940.)

During the period from 1929 to 1935, about a million farm families - one-sixth of the total in the United States - applied for relief of one form or another. (Pare Lorentz in Feb. 1941, McCall's magazine.)

We have a nation rich in food, but it isn't necessarily a nation of well-fed citizens. One of the facts we've got to face is that in this land of plenty, more than a third of our population - around 45,000,000 - are not getting the food they need to keep them above the safety line. --(M. L. Wilson, referring to a study made by the Bureau of Home Economics in 1936.)

Bureau of Home Economics itself says "About one-fourth of the families in the United States have diets that could be rated good more than a third or more have diets that might be considered fair another third or more have diets that should be classed as poor" -- (Booklet "Are We Well Fed?")

Forty percent of the American population are not properly fed. This means a slowing down of industrial production, a danger to military strength, and a lowering of the morale of millions. (Surgeon General Thomas Parran at Nat'l Nutrition Conf.)

Forty-five million of us are living below the safety line right now, because we are not getting the kinds and amounts of food necessary for strength and health. Hungry, undernourished people do not make for strong defense..... (Miss Harriet Elliott, Consumer member of the National Defense Advisory Commission.)

The people of the United States enjoy a higher average state of nutritional well-being than the people of any other large country in the world. Comparing ourselves with certain nations we find the difference so startling as to make us feel this country is truly blessed. Yet, when we study the facts cold-bloodedly and not boastfully, we find that at least three-fourths of the people in the United States do not have what can be called good diets by any reasonable standard. At least, 40,000,000 people in the United States are suffering from very bad diets When we consider the inadequacy of their meals, it is not surprising that 40 percent of the

young men examined for military service were rejected because of physical disability. (Vice President Wallace at Nat'l Nutrition Conference.)

There are 500,000,000 acres of land to till yet we have a million farm people wandering homeless on the highways. We have almost half our 32,000,000 farmer population in tenancy sharecropping, or day laboring, unable to work their lands for their own and their children's benefit. (Pare Lorentz in 2/1941 McCall's.)

Increases Needed in Foods

Recent dietary studies show the Nation's need for: At least 10 to 20 percent more milk, 10 to 25 percent more butter, 25 to 70 percent more tomatoes and citrus fruit, and about twice as much of leafy, green, and yellow vegetables. And we would do well to use twice the quantity of dairy products now consumed. (from B. H. E.'s "Are We Well Fed" booklet.)

If diets of American families were raised enough to be rated "good", consumption increases would be about as follows: Milk 20 percent, butter 15 percent, eggs 35 percent, tomatoes and citrus fruits 70 percent; and leafy, green and yellow vegetables 100 percent. (Dr. Hazel Stiebeling of BHE.)

The increase in quantities needed to provide for all our 31,000,000 farm people diets as good as those now enjoyed by the well-fed would aggregate in a year:

510 million gallons of milk
95 million pounds of butter
215 million dozen eggs
990 million pounds of tomatoes, citrus fruits
2,500 million pounds of leafy, green, yellow
vegetables
370 million pounds of meat and poultry
(dressed weight)

These foods generally are the ones that make the difference between good and poor diets in various parts of the country. They are foods that farm families seldom buy, or buy in comparatively small quantities. If farm families have them at all, or have them in substantial quantities, they raise them Therefore, well-considered home production programs are important contributors to dietary adequacy. (From "Outlook for Farm Family Living, 1941".)

Results of Some Nutrition and Health Surveys

Physical examinations made of 50 low-income farm families in each of two typical rural counties in Georgia (Oglethorpe and Laurens) revealed that the most common ailments of this cross-section of the low-income farming population were directly related to nutrition. Among the 575 persons in the 100 families examined, some 1,300 health handicaps were found. One hundred and thirty-two children had rickets, 14 persons had pellagra, and 31 persons were tuberculosis suspects. There were 330 individuals with defective teeth, and 124 with defective vision. In Laurens county, 35 to

40 percent of the people were suffering from hookworm. (Survey made by FSA.)

In Pope County, Arkansas, 180 FSA families with 879 members were given physical examinations and 550 were found with defective teeth, and 61 suffering from malnourishment. (FSA medical report.)

Avery County, North Carolina - Out of 66 families, 137 persons had defective teeth, 71 had intestinal parasites (47 of these were children), and 38 were undernourished (33 of whom were children). From FSA medical survey.

In a four-state scattered sample of persons in FSA borrower families, 65 percent of the white persons and 73 percent of the colored were found to have carious teeth. Although cause of dental caries is still subject to debate, there seems little question but that adequate general nutrition is fundamental to the formation and preservation of sound teeth. In this survey, as in others, the most prevalent defect has been that of dental caries.

An extensive study was sponsored by Farm Security in 1939 and 1940, in cooperation with state and county health departments in certain sections of Alabama and Georgia, to learn the extent of hookworm. In ten Alabama counties, 2,765 out of 10,052 specimens were positive - or 28 percent. In Georgia, 3,957 out of 10,297 specimens were positive - or 38 percent.

Where there are deficiencies in diet, there are usually excesses. In a study Miss Dinwiddie, Region VI HM Chief, made she found 59 percent of the diets in her sample deficient in fat, and 26 percent including excessive amounts of fat. As was to be expected, she found the greatest excess in the use of too much flour - 75 percent of the families.

Miss Dinwiddie studied the food consumption plans of 1,100 FSA families scattered over three southern states. She found 25 percent of these plans with insufficient amounts of milk and milk products. Nearly 80 percent needed more hens to have all the eggs they should eat. The most widespread deficiency occurred in meats, - including poultry and sea food, as well as beef, pork, etc. - where 92 percent of the families fell below the goal. In spite of much progress made in food preservation, there were deficiencies in canned vegetables among 78 percent of the families, and in canned fruits among 84 percent of the families.

A southern state board of health reported that out of 4,225 persons examined recently from low-income families, 87 percent were found to need dental work. This percentage included 95 percent of the adults, 87 percent of the school children, and 49 percent of the preschool children.

Quotation from Journal of Home Economics - February 1938. Article entitled "The Relation of Nutrition to the Development of Sound Teeth:"

"There is convincing evidence from many laboratories that dental caries can be arrested by dietary means; and, therefore, it is concluded that a diet high in minerals and in vitamins and with an adequate balance of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates is the best recommendation for the development of sound teeth and the prevention of dental caries."

Extent of Need Among Children

There are about 27,000,000 school children in the entire country. Many are found in those families whose diets are below the average.

Something like 9,000,000 school children are not getting a diet adequate for health and well-being. And malnutrition is our greatest producer of ill health. A well-nourished, healthy child is much better able to profit by school than a malnourished, sickly child. We are wasting money trying to educate children with half-starved bodies. They can't absorb our teaching. They hold back their classes, require extra time of their teachers, and repeat grades. This is expensive stupidity, but its immediate cost to our schools is as nothing compared to the ultimate cost to the Nation. (Dr. Thomas Parran, Surgeon Gen'l.)

Sir John Orr, Director of the Rowell Research Institute in Aberdeen and Director of the Imperial Bureau of Animal Nutrition, recently wrote from England that when the school day diets of malnourished children were supplemented with milk and other protective foods, their ability to learn markedly improved.

In a private school in Connecticut where malnutrition had not been conspicuous before, the average grades rose 10 percent when special attention was given to the nutritional adequacy of the food served.

Similar methods of improving the nutrition of industrial workers have produced encouraging results in Britain, according to Orr. The introduction of supplementary meals in factories has been followed by an increase in production and a marked reduction in accident.

A survey quoted in the Report of the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy indicates that 19 more children are born in every 100 tenant families than in every 100 farm owner families - and that 44 more children are born in every 100 farm labor families than in every 100 farm owner families.

Directly or indirectly Farm Security has helped about 3,000,000 children. It has helped them secure advantages of education, medical care, recreation, and decent living conditions they never had before. Nearly 2,700,000 of these children are in 885,000 families helped since 1935 by the rehabilitation phase of the Farm Security program. About 45,000 are children who live with their parents on homestead projects and the balance are children of migrant workers who find temporary homes during the year in FSA migrant labor camps.

About 1,500,000 boys and girls belong to 4-H clubs over the country, where they say the most popular of all projects are those dealing with food and nutrition. Many children in FSA families belong to 4-H clubs, and Farm Security makes small loans to the children themselves, when requested, to help them join.

Young Men Unfit for Selective Service

Selective Service has physically examined a million young men. The results of these examinations should be disturbing to us as a people-- they should energize us to immediate and positive action. About 400,000 have been found unfit for general military service, and probably a third of these are suffering from disabilities directly or indirectly connected with nutrition. (Brigadier-Gen'l Lewis B. Hershey, Deputy Director of the Selective Service System.)

During the past few months we have learned that over 40 percent of the young men of draft age are not physically fit. Many of them show defects that could have been prevented by proper nutrition. (Surgeon Gen'l. Thomas Paran)

An army medical report covering June, July, and August 1940 - the Southern New York District of the Second Corps Area - which includes New York City proper - showed: Out of total number of applicants covered by report, or 6,743, there were 2,195 rejected for failure to meet the physical requirements. This meant that 32.5 percent, or about one out of three, was found physically unfit to serve.

Of the 2,195 rejected, 516 were rejected due to teeth, or more than 23 percent. Next in importance as a cause for rejection was eyes - 479 applicants, or 21 percent of the total number rejected. Another 15 percent were rejected due to height and weight, 10 percent due to foot troubles, and 10 percent due to ear difficulties. (From Journal of Am. Med. Assn. 10/1940)

Low Incomes of Farm Families

The average income of two-thirds of our families is \$69 a month. In the lowest fringe, there are 30,000,000 people whose income per family averages \$9 a week. (Milo Perkins in 1940 Agriculture Yearbook)

In 1936 nearly 1,700,000 farm families were trying to live on an average income of less than \$500, including the value of everything they produced for their own use. These incomes were bad enough. But in the South, where half of all our farm families live, incomes were even lower. Even in so-called prosperous 1929, southern farm incomes averaged only \$186, and the incomes of tenants were less than half as much. (Dr. R. C. Williams, quoting from Government sources.)

In families with annual incomes under \$1200, only 26 percent of the members had no illness, while in families with annual incomes over \$5,000 the proportion with no illness was over 45 percent. (U. S. Dept. of Labor)

A Few FSA Figures on Rehabilitation

Up to April 30, 1941, Farm Security had loaned \$553,423,032 to more than 885,000 farm families since 1935.

The average value of home produce before families came onto the FSA program was \$163 per family. In 1940, average was \$264 per family.

The average number of quarts of fruits and vegetables canned per family in 1940 was 266. Before the families came onto the FSA program, it was 51 quarts per family. In 1939 it was 242 quarts per family, showing steady increase to now.

The average gallons of milk produced per family in 1940 was 391, and by coincidence, the number of pounds of meat produced per family in 1940 was 391, also.

During the last war, in 1917 and 1918, a total of some 22,000,000 quarts of food were canned by women all over the country under the supervision of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. In 1939, 360,000 FSA borrower families alone canned a total of 87,000,000 quarts of food for home consumption.

Families have about tripled production of food for home use since coming on the FSA program.

Miscellaneous

One tenth of our farm people today raise only 50 percent of the total farm products of the nation. (A. Drummond Jones, Sr. Social Scientist with BAE.)

U. S. families pay \$14,753,000,000 yearly for food. This is by far the largest single item of expenditure in the nation's spending. (May, 1940, Ladies Home Journal)

Surveys show that malnutrition is more prevalent among families in low-income classes than in high, among large families than among small, among Negro than among white families, and in the Southeast than in the North and West.

The South has more than half of the nation's farm people, and more than a fourth of America's total population, yet it produces only a third of the nation's pigs and cattle, a fifth of the country's eggs, milk, and butter, and an eighth of the potatoes. (From "Outlook for Farm Family Living, 1941" --)

The inadequacy of agricultural planning in one of our southern states is such that 72,000 farm families are without milk cows, and 30,000 families without poultry.

The South continues to be the cradle of the nation, having an excess of three births over the nation's average of 10 births per thousand.

Some 3,000 people died in Southern states in 1935 from pellagra and more than 100,000 black and white are dragging out their lives half dead of it. What is pellagra? It is starvation - nothing more or less. It is caused

from eating day after day and month after month the three M's - meat, meal, and molasses. And it is polite to call it meat. It is sow belly or fat back, devoid of lean. (Paul de Kruif, writing in Country Gentleman.)

The death rate from pellagra, a diet deficiency disease, is 8 times as high in the South as it is elsewhere - eight times the average for the country. Such common vegetables as carrots, spinach, and turnips are rarities in many southern farming communities, although both soil and climate are extremely favorable to their growth.

Pellagra, a form of malnutrition, demonstrably curable and preventable, has occurred in the past..... From 50 to 90 percent of southern children in large areas receive inadequate diets for any normal health standard. Perhaps more than 50 percent of all school children examined show carious teeth. Standard tests show inadequacy of minerals and proteins in most diets. There is large waste in tuberculosis, rickets, anemia, and many other results of poor diet. All of this in a land peculiarly fitted for a superabundance of food of all sorts. (Dr. Howard Odum's book "Southern Regions.")

One of the largest life insurance companies reported in a recent year "a rise of 7.3 percent in the death rate in the nine South Atlantic States, though in no other region had the death rate risen above 4.8 percent, and in some sections it has declined." (From Report to the President on "Economic Conditions in the South.")

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